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Week of
December 14, 1942

THEATRE REVIEWS

1942

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†"The Sun Field" opened Wednesday, December 9th, at the Biltmore Theatre.
†"The Willow and I" opened Thursday, December 10th, at the Windsor Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.

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"The Willow and I"

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
December 11, 1942

Martha Scott Stars in John Patrick Play of Love Of Two Ladies for a Man

BY JOHN ANDERSON

SINCE the allegedly current theatre seems determined to retreat to the past it produced another antimacassar drama at the Windsor last night called "The Willow and I" by John Patrick. Like "The Damask Cheek" its neighbor down 48th st., it deals with a man and the love of two ladies, the furtive sigh, the hidden tear, the tremulous smile and similar items in the regulation equipment of the what-not school of playwriting.

Unlike "The Damask Cheek," however, Mr. Patrick's play has neither the skill nor the power to make itself interesting, so it moons about in a sort of emotional twilight, vague, tenuous, and uncertain—the ghost, if I ever saw one, of a show.

You will excuse me I hope, and blame Mr. Patrick when I report that his drama concerns a young Southern girl who swoons on her wedding day, when she discovers that her sister also loves the man she is about to marry, and thereupon stays swooned for 20-odd years. It is, probably, the longest distance Olympic swoon-putting on record and Martha Scott achieves it by a headlong plunge into the make-up box. When she comes up for air and dialogue in the second act she is a changed woman, fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf, etcetera, not to say the flour barrel.

Lives in Trance

In her trance she knows not that her sister has married the man she loves, that the man himself has gone to the wars (World War I) and died, and left a son whose startling resemblance to his father may be partly accounted for by the fact that the two parts are played by the same actor.

Oh, Miss Mara didn't know a thing and I wasn't feeling any too sure myself. She just haunted the old house, somewhere near Spartanburg I gathered from the papers her father read, and stared out of the tall windows at a willow tree that had been planted for her the day she was born. File this part away under mysticism.

It was, as they say, a living death. The jealous sister who had robbed her of her life also shrivelled and grew bitter over the burden she had created for herself, and Father, after a lifetime of jugging, took to his wheel chair and couldn't even find the key to the liquor cupboard. Just when mean Sister Bessie had fixed up a way to slip Miss Mara into the goofy-coop a heavy electric storm broke backstage, the willow tree was destroyed, and Miss Mara recovered her so-called wits. You could have knocked me down with a strait-jacket.

Recovers Wits

Though I was quietly expecting this event I had erroneously supposed that when Miss Mara found her mind it would be like finding the family plate and that things would be better. But not with Mr. Patrick in there with the pyrography needle. Miss Mara cannot adjust herself to the world in which she skipped nearly three decades, and she insists on knowing that in spite of his marriage to her sister her true love loved her always.

When she discovers this she is transfigured and gazes out of the window with such a look of fulfillment that her nephew (who should have been her son) takes out his drawing board, with the convenience of having a painter in the family, and draws her for the central figure of a mural he is painting (I hope in some obscure cubbyhole) in Washington. Curtain.

Mr. Patrick gets off this sentimental bushwah with an air of such solemnity that he not only seems to believe in it himself, but he seems to have persuaded the actors to take it at face value. They go through it, under Donald Blackwell's tenebrous direction, as if they were playing Chopin's "Funeral March," and some excellent actors are wasted—notably Miss Scott and Gregory Peck, Lemuel Ayers has designed an admirable setting, and Mrs. Bernstein's costumes are beautiful to see.

It seems a pity the authors of "The Willow and I" and "Mr. Sycamore" didn't get together and abandon the theatre in favor of reforestation.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 11, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"The Willow and I"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"THE WILLOW AND I," which was offered last evening at the Windsor, is the work of John Patrick, a young playwright who temporarily has given up the playhouses for the larger theatre that lies somewhere in Africa. It is a good attempt at offering something outside the normal run of drama in the wintry Forties, and possibly had Mr. Patrick been here to do the final little jobs on his script, it would be even more. As it stands, the play is a combination of sometimes excellent psychological melodrama, talkiness, sincerity and repetition, all tossed together. Unfortunately, Broadway being what it is, the requirements are greater than "The Willow and I" has fulfilled.

* * *

Credit Mr. Patrick with the ability to touch up his dialogue so as to point character and debit him with the fact that he doesn't know when to stop, that his people go on aimlessly talking; the action upon his stage holds an audience for a time and then he lets it grow restless again. Psychological melodrama, which "The Willow and I" is, basically, has to keep building or it falls over backward of its own weight. For an act or so Mr. Patrick is very good, indeed, and then he doesn't know how to end it and the suspense is lost.

The play does do a service to the current theatre, however, in bringing Martha Scott back from an alien coast. She has a difficult role, at the start being a young woman and at the end an old lady, and in playing it she gives proof that she still is the Martha Scott who came into renown with "Our Town," unchanged or unspoiled by the fame she since has won elsewhere. She makes her part consistently believable; she has a gentle quality that is completely charming on the stage.

Miss Scott plays the part of Mara Sutro, one of two sisters, and the title comes from the fact that when she was born her father planted a willow tree in her honor. Her sister, Bessie, always has taken everything she wants, and when a young doctor appears on the scene the sister wants him, too. When she does not get him, Bessie tries to commit suicide and in the struggle over the pistol the younger girl loses her mind. Mr. Patrick is at his best when he is describing life in the household during the years when Bessie, as though in atonement for marrying the doctor, keeps her deranged sister by her; and he is at his worst when he brings in psychological patter to say why she may have done so. Finally, after many years, Mara recovers her mind; the doctor is dead, but everything else is much the same.

* * *

In addition to Miss Scott, the cast includes Barbara O'Neil, who plays Bessie with every sinister manner and voice in an actress' handbook, and is sometimes terrifying at it. Edward Pawley is the father of the household, a cynical old sinner whose character is not overly defined; Cora Witherspoon is a middle-aged aunt of the girls, and Gregory Peck plays both the doctor and his son. Donald Blackwell directed the play and Lemuel Ayers designed the setting. Every one tried; the misfortune lies in the fact that it did not quite succeed; had Mr. Patrick been here with his pencil, things might have been different.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
December 11, 1942

A Somber Play Draws a Blank

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE WILLOW AND I is a kind of rarity for these days—a serious, not to say somber, play. Unfortunately it is also a quite bad one. Mr. Patrick would seem to be a fairly intelligent writer, but nowhere does he seem to know what he wants to do or how he wants to do it. Some of *The Willow and I* is all too weakly literary. Some is all too gaudily cinematic. The two parts naturally collide instead of uniting; and worse yet, they leave no room for the play to be, as all good plays should, soundly dramatic.

Mr. Patrick's story, for one thing, is much more old-fashioned stuff than he perhaps imagined. Dealing with two sisters in love with the same man, it describes how the one he chose lost him on her wedding day through the actions of the other one; lost him and went out of her mind. Eventually the man married the other sister, who bore him a son. Long afterwards, when the man himself was dead, the sister regained her reason. There came, then, a Day of Reckoning, a Moment of Revelation, a Final Triumph.

* * *

Old-fashioned and high-pitched though most of this is, it yet might be exciting, might even have psychological and moral interest, if Mr. Patrick understood his job. But he knows neither how to focus his play nor how to fill it out. Such a drama needs, above all things, to be compact and intense. Mr. Patrick has only made it seem disconnected and desultory—filling it with irrelevant scenes, with periodic attempts at humor, with cynical old codgers, intrusive housemaids and babbling children. Perhaps Mr. Patrick thought all this would humanize his play, but in reality it has only completed its ruin. *The Willow and I* never stays taut for five minutes, and never maintains the same tone for three. As a result, when the "big" scenes arrive, fully panoplied with revolvers or thunder and lightning, they seem even stagier than they otherwise might. Like most "literary" dramatists, when Mr. Patrick goes melodramatic, he really shoots the works.

Martha Scott plays the unhappy lady whose mind is dimmed for 40 years with a certain obvious competence, but with no great imaginativeness. Barbara O'Neil brings real force to the more rewarding role of the other sister, and Gregory Peck is pleasant first as the husband and then as the son. But the whole thing, despite Lemuel Ayers' rich set and Aline Bernstein's attractive costumes, is little more than dull and pretentious trash.

"The Willow and I"

NEW YORK SUN
December 11, 1942

'The Willow and I,' Psychological Melodrama, Opens at the Windsor Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

JOHN Patrick's "The Willow and I," which opened last evening at the Windsor, is a strange, tormenting play and Mr. Patrick may very well have written it with a psychiatrist's case-book open on his knees. It is a melodrama of the mind; a gothic tale in which love, madness and some of the theater's better tricks are used to make an audience's nerves stand on end. It is also entirely engrossing drama, extraordinarily well acted.

Mr. Patrick is writing of two sisters, young in 1900 and in love then with the same tall young man. One of the sisters is frail and gentle; the other robust and assertive and used to getting what she wants with no struggle to speak of. But it is the gentle girl the young man loves and is about to marry—and never marries because the more violent sister tries to kill herself and the other, finding her with a revolver and wrestling with her for it, is shocked out of reality when the gun is fired. Her mind cowers back from the violence, runs into hiding in terror, and for forty years the girl lives in her clock-stopped mind on her summer wedding day. And then, in the violence of a summer storm, she awakens to find herself old and the whole world changed.

She finds that her sister has lied about the events of the day; that her lover married the sister and died; that they had a son who is very like the father. You may guess whose face she first sees when she returns to time and what it does to her; you may, if you are shrewd, guess much in the way of plot employed by Mr. Patrick. But the delicate twisting of the story you had better discover for yourself at the Windsor.

Mr. Patrick has written his play, thus barely outlined, with subtlety and cunning. The best of it has a shuddery intensity which leaves you sitting on the edge of your emotions. He has skillfully lightened it with humor and made some of the humor whip back in the end with unexpected bite. And with more than dexterity he suggests something of the turmoil a mind might know coming back after forty years to an aging body it had left young, finding that yesterday's bright, immediate people were dim memories in other minds, discovering that time had reduced tragedy to the stature of reminiscence. Here and there Mr. Patrick has overwritten, but in the main it is the quality of the writing which lifts "The Willow and I" out of the category of odd anecdotes into which it might easily have fallen.

'THE WILLOW AND I'

A play in three acts by John Patrick; staged by Donald Blackwell; setting by Lemuel Ayers; costumes by Aline Bernstein; presented at the Windsor Theater on December 10, 1942, by Blackwell and Curtis in association with David Merrick. The cast:

Bessie Sutro	Barbara O'Neil
Tinny	Amanda Randolph
Mara Sutro	Martha Scott
Bailey	R. Davis Williams
Theodore Sutro	Edward Pawley
Millie Sutro	Cora Witherspoon
Dr. Oliver	Robert Harrison
Robin Todd Kirkland Dodd	Gregory Peck
Duke Todd	Alec Englander
Mabel	Pauline Myers
Dr. Trubee	Francis Compton

The author has been uncommonly fortunate in his cast. Martha Scott returns—fortunately after less than forty years—to give a delicate, completely moving performance in the part of Mara Sutro, the girl whose mind fled from reality. Barbara O'Neil, particularly after the first act, is alarmingly convincing as the tougher sister; Gregory Peck plays two roles admirably and makes each distinctive; there are excellent performances by Cora Witherspoon, Amanda Randolph, Pauline Myers, Francis Compton and the rest.

"The Willow and I" is, altogether, enlivening. It will set your nerves on edge.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 11, 1942

'The Willow and I' a Drama About Good and Bad Sisters

"The Willow and I," drama by John Patrick. Produced by Blackwell and Curtis, in association with David Merrick, at the Windsor theatre, New York, Dec. 10, 1942.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

THERE was the good sister and the bad sister. The good sister was sweet, and modest, and lovely. The bad sister was assertive and possessive. The good sister gave and gave. The bad sister took and took.

One day there walked into their parlor as handsome a young doctor as you could ask to meet. Immediately the good sister accepted him as an answer to her prayers.

"I have been waiting for him all my life," she told herself. "And he has been waiting for me to open the door."

The bad sister, being less poetic but equally assured, bided her time. At the end of an off-stage year the good sister had won the handsome doctor, and the bad sister was ready to shoot herself in her disappointment.

The good sister, being horrified, tried to prevent the shooting. There was a struggle over the gun. A shot was fired and the shock helped to unhinge completely the good sister's mind.

A Lot of Plot

Thus ended the first act of "The Willow and I," a new play by John Patrick, which came to the Windsor Theatre last night.

It is as plotty a melodrama as we have seen recently, and it was produced, according to those who pretend to know, with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer money.

If it was, it will unquestionably reach the screen in due time, and probably make a first-class second grade picture. As drama I fear it is much too complicated and too obviously strained in a plot sense to excite popular interest, for all it is attractively staged and exceptionally well acted.

We jump thirty years between the second and third acts, and that is a big jump for most of the cast. The shocked sister is now a gentle automaton with no recollection of anything that has happened.

The bad sister has married the young doctor, borne him a handsome son, and lost him in death. The son, in turn, has married, got himself a son and divorced the lad's mother. See how it adds up?

It takes a lightning storm to restore the good sister's memory, and a confidential chat with her nephew, who is the spittin' image of his father, to convince her that God works in mysterious ways to salvage the souls of His people.

Nice Cast

In "The Willow and I" Martha Scott is returned to us after her successes in Hollywood. She is naturally a more seasoned actress than she was when she first played the heroine of "Our Town." Her performance of the good sister is nicely appealing.

Barbara O'Neil, who has also been making screen strides, is the unhappily possessive sister, and she, too, adds to her stature as an actress in this unsympathetic role.

Young Gregory Peck plays both the young doctor and later his son. Mr. Peck confirms the fine impression he made as another young doctor in "Morning Star," and is by way of becoming, I strongly believe, one of our most popular leading men, both here and on the coast. He has poise, good looks, a splendid voice and a compelling sympathy.

Edward Pawley plays an alcoholic ancient, Cora Witherspoon a spinster and there are several short parts ably sustained.

Nice set by Lemuel Ayers, costumes by Aline Bernstein and sympathetic staging by Donald Blackwell.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 11, 1942

Mad Old Maid

By HOWARD BARNES

A PSYCHOPATHIC melodrama has been fortified with vivid acting in "The Willow and I." There is no gainsaying the power of the principal portrayals in the new Windsor Theater offering. Separately and together, Martha Scott and Barbara O'Neil realize every savage implication of this John Patrick play. Given more explicit dramatic material and they would have made it something of a theatrical event. The rub is that the terror of mental torture and madness is never resolved in the compassion and pity that have marked first-class psychological thrillers, from "King Lear" to "The Children's Hour."

* * *

The author has selected a sound enough theme. His description of two sisters of the Victorian era, who fight for the same man's affection and destroy each other in the struggle, has melodramatic and neurotic suspense. When one becomes a lunatic and the other is oppressed by the knowledge that she was responsible for this fact, the stage is set for gripping tragedy. The tragedy is too elusive, here, though, for more than the eerie fascination which any exploration of the secrets of the soul can afford.

* * *

Mr. Patrick knows his way through the devious maze of mental aberrations. He has succeeded to a remarkable degree in charting a case record of self-induced insanity. Where he has failed to make his drama ring with ultimate dramatic overtones is in giving significance to his clinical study. The opening scene, in which a self-centered girl drives her sister out of her wits in order to marry a young doctor, is full of horror and tragic promise. The final passages, in which the demented creature recovers her sanity as a forlorn old woman, lack the human quotient which might have made them an absorbing and convincing climax.

* * *

No mental shocker could have been better served in most of its roles. Miss Scott is both radiant and terrible as the Victorian youngster, whose fear of her sister's competition makes most of her life a desert of madness. She almost succeeds in pulling the scattered strands of the human drama together in the vindictive ending. Miss O'Neil is excellent as the calculating sister, who wins a man but loses her own happiness. Meanwhile Edward Pawley, Cora Witherspoon, Gregory Peck and Francis Compton do what they can to fill out a tapestry of living which is too savage for comfort or conviction. Donald Blackwell's staging, the Lemuel Ayers sets and the Aline Bernstein costumes, incidentally, are handsome and befitting the central mood of the play. The play itself is what is wanting with "The Willow and I."

"The Willow and I"

NEW YORK POST
December 11, 1942

"The Willow and I" Opens At the Windsor Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

"THE WILLOW AND I," which was produced last night at the Windsor Theatre, is a confused and sometimes embarrassingly inept play, but it has moments that are provocative and affecting, when flashes of something approaching brilliance appear, only to die away again almost immediately.

John Patrick, the author, has set himself the task of handling some extremely delicate subject matter in "The Willow and I," and his dramatic technique is not up to it. Only now and then is he able to strike sparks from his material. Most of his scenes flare up for a second or two, sputter a bit and then go out.

The play begins in 1900, then jumps thirty years or so into more or less modern times. Any attempt to go into the plot would require considerable space and a diagram of the Sutro family tree. Mr. Patrick presents two sisters, Mara and Bessie Sutro, in love with the same man, Dr. Robin Todd. Just before the doctor and Mara are to be married, Bessie attempts to shoot herself. Mara tries to restrain her. There is a struggle and the gun goes off. No one is shot, but Mara falls senseless from shock and loses her mind.

The Sutro Sisters

She lives on in the house, her mind a blank, for many years, until one night during a violent electrical storm, something snaps in her brain and her memory returns. She is back on her wedding day and thinks she sees the man she was on the verge of marrying. But it is not Robin that she sees, but her nephew, Robin's son, and Bessie's.

Keeping up with events in the Sutro household requires a certain amount of mental agility on the part of the audience, and Mr. Patrick is reduced to some pretty bald stretches of exposition to indicate what has transpired during the passing years. He never did succeed in convincing us that Dr. Robin Todd ever actually married Bessie after Mara lost her mind, but went right on living in the house.

Granting him that purely fictional development, however, it is possible to work up a certain pathological interest in the situation of a girl of the 1900 era who suddenly wakes up one night to find herself a middle-aged woman in a bewildering modern world.

Mr. Patrick has been more successful in drawing his characters than in resolving his drama. Despite some interesting discussion in the last act, when Mara is trying to readjust herself to a new life, his play remains muddled and comes in the end to very little.

A Good Company

The characters of the two sisters, however, are effectively drawn and well played by Martha Scott and Barbara O'Neil. Miss Scott is breath-takingly lovely as the fragile Mara of the first act, and she handles her wraith-like reappearance as an aging and broken woman with heart-breaking simplicity. Miss O'Neil as the sister who never told of her part in the scene which sent Mara out of her mind is convincingly bedeviled by jealousy and hatred.

Edward Pawley is occasionally inaudible but generally effective as the sardonic father who has been drinking himself to death for years, while Gregory Peck is enormously ingratiating in the dual role of the Dr. Robin Todd and his artist son. Those parts, especially that of the son, are warmly written, and Mr. Peck plays with charm and spirit.

Cora Witherspoon, Francis Compton, Robert Harrison, Amanda Randolph and Pauline Myers are helpful in supporting roles and two very beguiling little boys, black and white, enliven the proceedings from time to time. R. Davis Williams, the little black boy, and Alec Englander, the little white boy, are both delightful youngsters and a great help to a play that has about it a certain sense of quality, but is often very distressing as well.

No Help From the Audience

Donald Blackwell has directed the work with respect for its finer qualities and the production is nicely set by Lemuel Ayers and attractively costumed by Aline Bernstein.

"The Willow and I" is an exasperating play in many respects and it seldom manages to achieve more than a fraction of the effects it is after, but it has moments that indicate we may yet be hearing more from Mr. Patrick one of these days.

Actors and play had to contend with one of the worst-behaved first-night audiences we have encountered in some time. Gargling, braying and snorting were among its accomplishments, and a certain section insisted on clapping and giggling at most of the wrong moments. At the end, whistling and stamping were in order. Better plays than "The Willow and I" would have found the going hard in such a gathering.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 11, 1942

Psychoanalytic Play Opens at Windsor

By BURTON RASCOE

THE WILLOW AND I, by John Patrick, which opened at the Windsor last night, is a drama of triple frustration with a psychoanalytical solution in the last act. As is often the case with psychoanalysis, the explanation for eccentric psychic behavior comes long after the damage has been done, and the cure seems only to complicate matters and make an intolerable situation all the more intolerable.

In this play, as it opens, there are two sisters living in a town of 25,000 in the spring of 1900. Their mother is dead; their father is a roue and a drunkard, who was, at one time, a successful artist, and is now living beyond his means on a modest income. The older sister is anemic and sickly; the younger sister is healthy, headstrong, attractive and selfish. All their lives the older sister has given in to the younger, even yielding up her best clothes to her and contenting herself with the second best in order that the younger sister may always appear to her best advantage.

Both Sisters Love the Same Man

The two sisters fall in love with the same man. The older one wins out and is preparing for her wedding when she discovers her disappointed younger sister about to kill herself. In a scuffle over the pistol it goes off. No one is hurt but the bride-to-be faints. When she is revived she has lost her reason.

When the curtain goes up on the next act over 40 years have passed. The older sister is still insane, cared for tenderly by the other sister who has meanwhile married the man they both loved, and he has died, leaving her with a grown son and a grandson.

During a thunderstorm one night the younger sister confides to the present family doctor that all these years she has lived under a peculiar dread because she had allowed the facts to be misrepresented. Her false explanation of the "accident" had been that she had found her sister about to commit suicide on her wedding day because she had found a check the groom had made out to her (the younger sister) and had misinterpreted its meaning—that she had prevented her older sister from suicide and that, in her frustration, her sister had lost her reason. The check was an innocent one, made out by the bridegroom as a new member of an impoverished family to the younger sister in order that she might go away to study. She also confides to the doctor that she had hated her older sister for taking the man she loved away from her, and that she loathes her still, although her conscience has made her devote all these years to her sister's care.

Older Sister Regains Her Reason

During this same thunderstorm the older sister regains her reason, in a way not well accounted for (or maybe I just didn't get it). Everything as it was on that wedding morning suddenly comes back to her—so vividly that she mistakes her nephew for her intended husband. Her memory is a complete blank concerning all the years she was suffering from the traumatic psychosis. In order, however, to keep her sanity she must recall the exact details of the beginning of the tragedy.

It is perhaps unfair to give away the details of the plot beyond this point, but this is not a mystery story: it is a drama of the workings of the subconscious mind. You will therefore be surprised to learn that the older sister believed that in the scuffle she had accidentally killed her sister—she had definitely wanted to kill her—and this belief had caused her mind to vanish. The antagonism between the sisters is again whipped to white heat, and the renewed fight of mind against mind is over whether the man loved the one or the other, inasmuch as he had never possessed the older sister but had married and had a child by the younger sister.

The curtain scene is that of the nephew, an artist, seized with a desire to paint the older sister as she stands transfixed with the ecstatic realization that the man did, indeed, love her. As the boy's mother comes into the room he waves her away, saying he has a painting he will call Fulfilment.

* * *

Play Is Beautifully Done

The play is beautifully done. The casting is faultless. The settings are perfect. I never heard a more realistic rain and thunderstorm than that in the second act. The first act is wholly exciting, with interludes of charm, furnished largely by little R. Davis Williams and Amanda Randolph. The second act has suspense and interest. But somehow the third act left the author's intention very vague to me. Anyone with any sense knows those two sisters are not going to get along any better, now that the older sister knows the truth, than they did before, and the older sister's triumph can only mean misery for the innocent. It would seem better for all concerned if the insane sister had not regained her reason. Perhaps the very inconclusiveness of the play was the author's intention—all along he says in the character of the father that there is no such thing as retribution—and perhaps also it is the very thing that will make it a success. I liked the play well enough to want to see it again; but it is only fair to say I overheard comments of people who didn't like it at all.

The whole cast was so good that I especially mention Martha Scott, Barbara O'Neil and Gregory Peck only because they carried the burden of the play and did it faultlessly, and I mention Amanda Randolph and Pauline Myers only because they were given natural lines to speak instead of the conventional lines of the Negro servant; they were entirely credible human beings, not the condescending caricatures of a race that Negro servants in plays and movies usually are. And the two children, one white and one colored, were wonderful.

I hear this is John Patrick's first play and that he is somewhere in Africa and was therefore unable to attend the opening. He certainly could not complain with the way his work was presented.

"The Sun Field"

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
December 10, 1942

Heywood Broun's Novel Of Baseball Dramatized By Milton Lazarus

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH baseball, I may as well confess, has always seemed to me one of the dullest subjects in the world, the late Heywood Broun could write about a game in a way that made it fascinating, even against my better judgment.

But the dramatization of his baseball novel, "The Sun Field," presented at the Biltmore last night, managed to miss all the gusto and humor of his writing, and even the public excitement of the diamond.

Milton Lazarus has turned the 20-year-old novel into just a routine and rather stodgy play about a home run king whose love-life interfered with his batting average. It seemed difficult to believe that even the other characters cared.

You may protest, then, that I have no business reviewing a play on a subject that already has, if I may borrow a term, two strikes against it. But the objections are overruled. Neither do I like horse racing, but "Three Men On a Horse" seemed hilarious.

I don't care a hoot for the private lives, if any, of movie stars, and I loathe professional Amazons, but "Personal Appearance" and "By Jupiter" turned both subjects into first rate entertainment.

Unsmiling Event

So it is not the subject, but the material and Mr. Lazarus' treatment of it that makes "The Sun Field" a soggy and unsmiling event on the stage. There is almost a superstition in the theatre that you can't make baseball players interesting—even when the great Lardner tried it himself.

Certainly the Broun-Lazarus plot is as trite as it is trashy. "Tiny" Tyler, who is the mainstay of one of the major teams, falls in love with a social and intellectual lady who writes a piece about him for a smart magazine. Since she has only a yen for Tiny, she is bored when he treats her with reverent awe, and finally marries him in desperation to make an honest man of him.

The marriage goes on the rocks; Tiny loses eight games and finally the pennant, takes to boozing with a floozey, and when he is back in condition again decides to divorce Mrs. Snob.

She turns up at training camp, both decide that they really loved one another all the time, and the curtain falls on the happy pair enarmed in mutual understanding. I found myself siding with the team officials, who thought the situation just an unnecessary nuisance.

Attempts at Humor

There is a good deal of effort to create a baseball atmosphere and there is the chit-chat of other players and their wives. None of it ever suggested much feeling of character, or the picturesqueness of people leading unusual lives in the glare of baseball importance. They seemed merely stock figures using stenciled talk in routine situations.

There were attempts at raw-boned humor in a sandlot southpaw, a touch of pathos in a catcher whose eye-sight was failing, and some obvious ridicule of the team owner who pretended he was interested in sport, but was merely trying to make money.

Faced with such carbon-paper characters, the players may be excused. Claudia Morgan, Joel Ashley, Tom Tulley, Florence Sundstrom, Donald Randolph and Fay Baker tried hard enough, and Howard Lang, the producer, gave it a generous production, but to no avail.

Even I would almost rather see a ball game. God forbid!

'THE SUN FIELD'

A play in three acts by Milton Lazarus; based on a novel of the same title by Heywood Broun; directed by Edward Clarke Lilley; designed by Ernest Glover; presented at the Biltmore Theater on December 9, 1942, by Howard Lang. The cast:

Lefty Hendricks	Jay Brassfield
Bill Doyle	Robert Lynn
Carl Randolph	Karl Malden
Whacky Cassatt	Fred Sherman
Mrs. Doyle	Betty Kean
Jack Kennelly	Frank Otto
Jim Rocco	Lewis Charles
Mrs. Rocco	Kaherine Meskill
George Wallace	Donald Randolph
Warren Yost	Tom Tully
Tiny Tyler	Joel Ashley
Karyl Dumont	Florence Sundstrom
Bell Captain	Regis Joyce
Judith Winthrop	Claudia Morgan
Hugh Coler	Richard Gordon
Bessie	Georgia Burke
Mildred Deagon	Fay Baker
Waitress	Dorothy Eaton
Samuel Dickerman	Herbert Duffy
Rookie	Richard Midgley
Radio Voice	Bill Stern

NEW YORK POST
December 10, 1942

"The Sun Field," a Play About Baseball, Opens at the Biltmore

By WILELLA WALDORF

SINCE the late Heywood Broun wrote "The Sun Field," a number of plays about baseball have come and gone along Broadway. Milton Lazarus' dramatic version of the Broun novel, produced last night at the Biltmore Theatre, runs in a familiar groove. Perhaps it may exercise a certain fascination over rabid ball fans, but for those of us who couldn't even tell you at the moment whether the Brooklyn Dodgers are in the National or the American League, it is only mildly diverting theatrical fare.

The big league hero of "The Sun Field" is "Tiny" Tyler, whose batting average is prodigious. It looks as if his team is headed for the pennant when Judith Winthrop comes in to interview him for the sophisticated magazine she works on, and before long they're married.

"Tiny," whose education has been somewhat neglected although he once attended N. Y. U. in an absent-minded manner, is so overwhelmed with humble admiration for the Lady he has married (who went to Vassar and probably helped lug the Daisy Chain), that he gives up drinking, women and Western Stories and takes to reading Schopenhauer in small, paper-covered booklets. He wants to be worthy of her, he says.

Judging from Judith's literary style in the excerpts from her magazine articles the audience has to listen to, he needn't have bothered, and the Lady herself is upset at the change, for she didn't marry him for love, alas! but because she was attracted by the great big hunk of ball-player, yet not the sort of girl who goes about indulging in casual "affairs."

No More Home Runs

Ah, well. Marriage and Schopenhauer have an adverse effect on Tiny's batting average. No more home runs are clouted from his beautiful ebony bat and the club's hopes of winning the pennant wane, rendering Mrs. Tyler a very unpopular personage with the team and its wives and the fans accustomed to betting on it.

(All this chatter about pennants and batting averages is pure swank on our part. We're trying to sound like a sports writer, but something tells us nobody will be fooled.)

It takes quite a while, and a great deal of scene shifting, to patch up this distressing state of affairs, but the inevitable happy ending is eventually achieved after a series of familiar episodes, including the one in which the hero orders quarts of Scotch from the Bell Captain and gets tanked up just before the Big Game.

The second act ends with a broadcast of the game by Bill Stern, the sports announcer, that is quite exciting, but they'll probably do better with it in the movies by taking the cameras right into the ball park. "The Sun Field" is routine on the stage. On the screen the plot won't matter so much. They'll fill out the footage with real baseball.

Joel Ashley gives a believable performance as "Tiny" Tyler. Claudia Morgan is attractive as Judith, the writer for the slick-paper magazines, and if she isn't particularly believable, that's the author's fault, not Miss Morgan's. Donald Randolph as a gentlemanly sports writer, Tom Tully as the team's perspiring manager, Karl Malden as a baseball player whose career is finished by eye trouble, and Florence Sundstrom as a camp follower, turn in helpful characterizations, and the cast in general is superior to the play. That statement is fast becoming an axiom along Broadway. As the wife of one of the players, Betty Kean has a droll manner and a personality that ought to get her places as a comedienne when she has acquired a little more experience as an actress.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
December 10, 1942

Nobody Even Gets to First

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

I'VE never read the Heywood Broun novel that Mr. Lazarus has adapted for the stage, but it can hardly have much in common with Mr. Lazarus' play. Perhaps it isn't a very good novel. But, taking the gloomiest possible view of it, Broun not only knew a lot more about baseball than Mr. Lazarus appears to know; he knew a lot more about people; he knew a lot more about how to tell a story; he knew a lot more about how to raise a laugh. There has never, to my knowledge, been a very good baseball play. But there has never, to my knowledge, been as bad a one as *The Sun Field*.

Mr. Lazarus is concerned with the romance between Tiny Tyler, the greatest slugger in one of the major leagues, and Judith Winthrop, a pretty and sophisticated young magazine writer. Tiny, who is used to a different kind of lady, falls for Judith from the moment she arrives to interview him. In time they marry. When she leaves him on the road to go home to a new job, he concludes that she has walked out on him. As a result, he never hits another ball, blows the game that decides the pennant, takes up with the floozy of his bachelor days. It's not until another season has dawned that the young people are reunited.

* * *

Mr. Lazarus requires 10 scenes to make everything go wrong and then come right, and 10 talky and rambling and foolish scenes they assuredly are. For what I suppose was meant to be atmosphere, all kinds of ball-players, ballplayers' wives, managers, club owners, editors, wisecrackers and radio voices wander in and out of the story, and perhaps half a dozen times during the evening somebody says something passably amusing.

If *The Sun Field* has any claim to being interesting, it's that some strange things happen in it. In spite of the large cast, for example, there seem to be only six players on Tiny's team. It also appears that when this shorthanded group goes South for Spring training, floozies go right along with it. These are matters that, being no baseball expert, I am willing to waive judgment on. But when Mr. Lazarus shows a magazine editor personally delivering the proofs of his contributors' articles, I must insist on protesting. Or at least on asking for the name of the magazine.

Joel Ashley and Claudia Morgan do as well as they can in the leading roles, and Florence Sundstrom, Betty Kean and Katherine Meskill are competent in minor ones.

"The Sun Field"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 10, 1942

'The Sun Field' Tells About the Ball Player and the Lady

"The Sun Field," comedy by Milton Lazarus, from a novel by Heywood Broun. Produced by Howard Lang at the Biltmore theatre, New York, Dec. 9, 1942.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

HEYWOOD BROUN, as a drama critic, did not care much for obvious little romances concerning ladies who marry for adventure and discover love lurking around the corner of the third act.

But Heywood did like salty talk from reasonably believable characters. So I suspect if he had been present at the Biltmore theatre last night, and had seen what Milton Lazarus has extracted in the way of a comedy from the Broun novel called "The Sun Field," he would have belittled the romance and spoken well of the characters and the chatter.

And, as usual, Heywood would have been right. "The Sun Field" is a story of a glamorous baseball hero with a batting eye that earned him such a record as Babe Ruth once boasted.

"Tiny" Tyler they called him, and when he wasn't keeping his eye on the ball he was keeping it on the girls, who rushed him something awful.

Along Came Judith

He didn't take the dames seriously, however, until Judith Winthrop came along. Judith was a magazine writer who didn't know anything about baseball, but liked her men rough and natural.

She didn't love Tiny, but she developed a romantic interest in the handsome ox and married him. Judith being the only lady who had come into his life, Tiny started trying to live up to her. Quit liquor. Quit playing around. And quit hitting the ball. This cost his club the pennant.

Took them a year to get straightened out. Didn't seem to me results justified the struggle. Didn't seem to excite the audience to anything more than a few chuckles at the lines Mr. Lazarus probably found in the book.

"The Sun Field" will have to depend for popularity on those fans who found "The Life of Riley" amusing for a few weeks, but it isn't going to be easy to get them into the theatre. "Riley" couldn't do it, for all it was a story about the popular Dodgers.

A Marine Takes Over

Claudia Morgan is the adventuring career girl, and as romantically earnest as ever. A tanned and healthy Claudia, with new clothes and at least one funny hat.

Joel Ashley plays Tiny, also with commendable earnestness and an apparent liking for the job. He was a Marine until a gun carriage rolled into him in San Diego. They sent him home with an honorable discharge.

Short parts with smart talk were amusingly played by Betty Kean, Florence Sundstrom, Fay Baker and Katherine Meskill.

Donald Randolph, who used to be Gertrude Lawrence's psychoanalyst in "Lady in the Dark," is a sacrificing lover. Tom Tully plays a worried manager, Herbert Duffy a nervous club owner representing the bank, Richard Gordon a magazine editor and Karl Malden a sympathetic pal.

Producer Lang has financed a good scenic setting by Ernest Glover. Edward Clarke Lilley did the staging and probably kept the action as reasonable as the text permits. He couldn't help its being a little awkward.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 10, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"The Sun Field"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

SINCE among the recognized great American pastimes are baseball and the writing of plays, Milton Lazarus, like a number of others before him, has decided reasonably enough to combine the two. From "The Sun Field," a novel written by the late Heywood Broun, he has taken the story of the player who married the cultured pearl and thereafter went into a slump such as only the Dodgers could emulate in real life. While there are some funny lines in the comedy, the evening at the Biltmore suggested on the whole that, sad as it may be, the baseball season ended last Fall, when the pennant went off to St. Louis. Mr. Lazarus is not offering a post-season game of sufficient interest to tide over the Stadium's fierce children until time for Spring training.

There have been a number of baseball plays, and local authorities were saying last evening that none of them has done too well, even "Elmer the Great," by the master himself, the late Ring Lardner. Possibly they all have fallen into a formula; at all events, Mr. Lazarus has offered very little outside the routine saga of a ballplayer and his girl. Every one who reads fiction knows that batting slumps are caused by emotional unrest, that managers are tough, that catchers are kindly and that ballplayers—with the exception of Moe Berg, who is practically fiction personified—are either dazed, whacky or of very low intelligence quotient. Possibly Mr. Lardner set the style for all this, and Mr. Lazarus in the present instance is still swinging in the groove.

* * *

The ballplayer of "The Sun Field" is Tiny Tyler, outfielder and home-run king, who went to N. Y. U. but "got expelled for dropping a pass in the Fordham game." He has the misfortune to fall in love with a magazine writer sent to interview him; she apparently wants to get down to his level from hers, which was Vassar, and he wants to get up by reading selections, in those little blue books, from Schopenhauer. Naturally he stops hitting home runs, and the team blows an eight-game lead. During the Winter Tiny takes up with an old friend, but the wife—their marriages coincided with the autumnal slump—comes down to Florida after him, and the curtain goes down on clear indications that the team will do better this year.

* * *

Joel Ashley plays the luckless "Tiny," making him neither a moron nor an intellectual; making him, in fact, what appears to be a pretty good ballplayer caught in forces outside his control. Claudia Morgan has to play a peculiar part, for Judith Winthrop is not clearly drawn, leaving to the actress the rather desperate business of changing off from emotional dramatics to comedy and then back again without warning or much apparent reason. Tom Tully is the manager (tough), Karl Malden the catcher, and Betty Kean and Katherine Meskill are two of the players' wives. Florence Sundstrom has the role of the girl who long has been going around with ballplayers, and out of radio comes the voice of Bill Stern to do the broadcasting, which makes it practically official. Edward Clarke Lilley directed.

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

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Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

"The Sun Field"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 10, 1942

Broun Novel Presented as Play at Biltmore

By BURTON RASCOE

ONCE there was a movie called Last Train from Madrid. It drew rave notices; the public liked it; it raked in the fodder at the box-office. It was one of those things that made movie producers want, right away, "something along that order, but original and different." A script writer at the time told me of an assignment he was given. His boss called him into his office and said, "I got a great idea for a play last night—a wow. I want to see what you can do with it. The title will knock you dead—Last Balloon from Sacramento! . . . There's a boy and a girl and an earthquake, see? . . ."

The only possible reason I can imagine that any one would want to make a play out of the late Heywood Broun's very bad novel, The Sun Field, is that an extraordinarily good movie about Lou Gehrig, with Gary Cooper as Lou, is one of the year's tops as a moneymaker; and somebody remembered that The Sun Field was supposed to be about Babe Ruth and so thought that a play out of it would be another Pride of the Yankees, only "original and different," and that, even if it didn't click on Broadway, it had wonderful possibilities as a movie. Maybe it has; but as a play it seemed to me a dreary and pointless set of scenes, in which people kept on walking in and out of doors like the 5 o'clock crowds at the subway turnstile; excitement was aimed at, from time to time, by a character named Whacky Cassatt bursting on the scene with a loud voice; the telephone was used when the author couldn't speed the action with a cast of 21; the old device of the radio bringing the important news of the big game was dragged in as the second act curtain and in which rather smutty wisecracks of the bathtub gin era were sprinkled like synthetic paprika over corn syrup.

Broun's Idea Didn't Click

The late Heywood Broun had a great admiration for Babe Ruth and often wrote of his ball playing in aesthetic terms, likening the Babe's performances at the bat and in the sun field to great works of art. And, it seems, Mr. Broun tried to imagine what would happen to the Babe if he fell in love with and married somebody like the late Ruth Hale (Mr. Broun's wife at the time)—an intense and sophisticated person, a gifted journalist who wrote for highbrow publications, an ardent feminist who would insist upon maintaining her individuality, and who would, at first, regard her husband as a great natural genius whose art as a ball player must not only be nourished according to her notions but celebrated in rhetoric of a very tony kind, filled with classical allusions.

I believe Mr. Broun was amused by the idea, at first, and thought it offered an opportunity for some mild satire upon the aesthetic cliches of the highbrows of the period, but, as he got along with the novel, his predilection for a sort of pseudo-poetic sentimentality got the upper hand and the novel, as a novel, came to nothing.

Thus last night you had "Tiny" Tyler (played by Joel Ashley) called the Home-run King and the Sultan of Swat (as was the Babe) by the sports writers and playing the sun field for the New York Yankees. A Vassar graduate who writes on extremely elevated subjects in an extremely elevated manner for an extremely artistic journal, sees her first baseball game and coincidentally she sees Tyler make a home run and make a catch that sends her head spinning with phrases like "Thor cast his thunderbolts" and "sculptured a Greek God" to describe a hero for whom her first yen is aesthetic entirely. The simple fellow is bowled over by her superior manner, her Vassar tone modulations and her vocabulary, and begins to read Schopenhauer and The World's Wit and Wisdom from the Haldemann-Julius nickel library to make himself "worthy of her."

She marries him abruptly, apparently as a whim, and when, on the road, she finds her husband has gone domestic on her, no longer gets magnificently drunk and has improved himself to the harm of his ball playing, she leaves him, temporarily, for his own good—and because she has just been offered an associate editorship of the highbrow magazine.

Play 1920ish in Tone

He takes up with a tart, gets soused on the day of the big game, and loses the world series by fanning in the ninth with three men on bases and two out. But, according to the play, the tart is good for him, while his wife is poison, and, with the tart along, his Florida training indicates he will be back as the old king of swat when the season opens. Then the wife drops by to deliver him his "release" (he has sued her for divorce) and, having learned a trick or two from the tart, wins him back again.

Thus, though the curtain ends on a clinch which seems to be the playwright's way of saying that it was true love all along and now the king will be emperor of swat, the audience inevitably feels the same way as the team's manager — that Tyler's next season will be on the bench and his ultimate destination the sticks. For there is nothing in the play to lead you to think otherwise. Some of the audience seemed to like the play last night and there was laughter at some of the more anatomical and concupiscent wisecracks; but the wisecracks, like the play, were early nineteen-twentyish in tone and style.

One bit of tragic emotion was successfully evoked by Karl Malden as the player who is necessarily benched, with the deep sympathy of all, because a cataract has developed in his eye. Other players whose work was particularly good were Tom Tully as the team manager; Betty Kean as an understanding ball-player's wife; Regis Joyce as the ball captain, and Florence Sundstrom as the tart. Claudia Morgan is beautiful to look at, but her constant superior smile was a little too much for me.

NEW YORK SUN
December 10, 1942

'The Sun Field,' a Lengthy Anecdote, Opens at the Biltmore Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

A SOMEWHAT protracted anecdote about an outfielder and a lady, called "The Sun Field" and written by Milton Lazarus, came into the Biltmore Theatre last evening and occupied a good many scenes, several of them reasonably amusing. Peculiar ball players and their variegated wives are freely displayed; there is a lively broadcast of a big ninth inning and hotel bedrooms are as crowded as railroad stations. More ought to come of this, perhaps.

More ought, reasonably, to come from a play based on Heywood Broun's pleasant little novel of some years back and it was Mr. Broun's novel of the same title which inspired Mr. Lazarus. Or, at any rate, it was Mr. Broun's novel which gave Mr. Lazarus the idea of bringing together a polished graduate of Vassar and a home-run king and making them, after a considerable struggle, like it. They didn't get along so well at first. He, dazzled by the lady's learning, overwhelmed to realize that she wrote for magazines, began to read Schopenhauer in little blue books. He also began to strike out. This bored the lady, who thought—or thought she thought—that she only wanted a fine, lusty animal, overflowing with verve and bad grammar.

The major result of all this, so far as I could see, was that the great Tiny Tyler fanned with the bases loaded in the ninth inning. His mind was on other things and he missed a high fast ball with nothing on it, although usually he knocked such over the fence. This cost his team the pennant and fed him up with the literary approach, driving him to the arms of a plump number who just liked baseball players and was not, by them, reminded of Thor throwing a thunderbolt. But by the last act the lady, who then knew she really loved Tiny, got him back—and cost the team another pennant, for all I know.

Mr. Lazarus has ornamented this account with diverting interludes and some sprightly dialogue—and with one or two double meanings which are fairly startling. But it still drags sadly. This seems to be because it is impossible to care much how things turn out. "The Sun Field" on the stage is merely a long, rather improbable story about nothing in particular. Mr. Lazarus makes too much of it.

Claudia Morgan is ornamental and personally convincing in a part which, in the writing, is never convincing for a moment. Joel Ashley is a very good Tiny, barring a slight tendency to slip out of character at intervals. And there are amusing performances by Jay Brassfield, Betty Kean, Katherine Meskill, Fred Sherman, Fay Baker and Lewis Charles, among others. "The Sun Field" is a second division play, however.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 10, 1942

No Runs, No Hits

By HOWARD BARNES

OUR national pastime has rarely seemed less fascinating than it does in "The Sun Field." This saga of swat, which sprawled across the stage of the Biltmore last evening, is equally dull as sports writing and theater. Although it is based on an early novel by Heywood Broun, it evidences none of the incisive documentation and feeling for character which made that author a giant among journalists. A large cast and a rather tricky production do little to help matters. As it stands, it is a genuine bore.

• • •

Lord knows that baseball is not a game which lends itself felicitously to dramatic treatment. Listening to the decisive contest in a pennant series over the radio, as one must do in "The Sun Field," is paltry substitute for the infectious excitement of the sport itself, whether it is staged on a back lot or in the Yankee Stadium. At the same time those curious athletes who play ball for dough, get traded around the circuit and try to fit their private lives into their professional careers, are worthy of celebration. They rate a lot more than they get in Howard Lang's production.

• • •

Milton Lazarus, who composed "The Sun Field," has obviously tried to catch the flavor and goofy excitement of big-league doings in his script. He has merely succeeded in writing a tedious yarn about a hitting wizard, whose batting average is dandy until he meets a Vassar graduate and tries to better his mind. In a book, this sort of satirical commentary can be highly diverting. It can even contain a degree of warmth and sympathy. Unfortunately, there is no more compassion than there is fun in the Biltmore offering.

• • •

The players are so shackled by the script that it is difficult to evaluate their efforts. Joel Ashley is frequently engaging and persuasive as the instinctive slugger, who starts striking out when he meets a nice girl. Claudia Morgan is effective enough as the writer who marries a baseball bum, leaves him and then unaccountably returns to his bed and board. Robert Lynn, Fred Sherman, Frank Otto and Tom Tully look and act like fellows you would expect to find around a ball park, but they are not very entertaining in an endless series of scenes which never succeed in getting to first base dramatically. "The Sun Field" tries hard to frame the great American game in theatrical terms, but it fails dismally.